

She was launched in October 1944 and commissioned in December of that same year as the U.S.S. Duxbury Bay, a war time product of the teeming Lake Washington shipyard on the shores of Puget Sound. By March she had had her shake-down cruise, and her crew was being drilled in her function of seaplane tender as she left San Diego, bound for Pearl Harbor for assignment to Air Force, Pacific Fleet.

The navy rated the U.S.S. Duxbury Bay a small ship, only 310 feet long with a 42-foot beam; but if she had ever sailed in to visit the waters that gave her her name she would have seemed immense, 3 times as long as the re-created Mayflower secured to the pier at Plymouth, and infinitely more powerful with her 2 sets of diesels that would drive her at 17 knots across every ocean in the world over the next 2 decades.

In 1945 she was a small unit in the vast naval forces converging on the weakening Japanese, touching at Eniwetok Atoll, the Marshalls, Guam, the Carolines, and at last seeing action at Kerama Retto in Okinawa where for the first time she came under enemy air attack, received some slight damage and lost a single member of her crew in combat, her only fatality in the weeks of the war that remained. Her seaplanes, largely engaged in vital reconnaissance, kept her apart from the heavy fighting but in action nevertheless, until the deadly A bomb wrote finis to the bitter Pacific struggle.

After the Japanese capitulation, the Duxbury Bay that had never yet seen her home waters, visited Asiatic lands that ships built in Duxbury had reached over a century before, showing the flag along the Chinese coast from Shanghai to Tsingto, even to Jinso Ko, Korea. For some months she remained on guard duty in Japan, then at last returned home to San Francisco in October 1946 after almost 18 months of foreign duty.

The Duxbury Bay would always be a wanderer, though, and in the next 2 years cruised extensively in the Far East, tending her planes as she had during the war on missions that no longer involved the possibility of enemy action. In 1949 for the first time she steamed into the Atlantic to participate in cold weather exercises off Halifax, Nova Scotia, thereby beginning a new phase of her career on the opposite side of the world from her first tour of duty.

From 1950 on she made 15 trips to the Persian Gulf, where she served each time as flagship for Commander, Middle East Force. Away from home for 7 months at a time, she called at almost every southern European and Mediterranean port including Lisbon, Gibraltar, Barcelona, Cannes, Villefrance, Genoa, Naples, Athens, Beirut, Port Said, and Port Suez. As flagship her tour of duty took her to Bahrain Island, headquarters of Middle East Force; Karachi, Pakistan; Colombo, Tinomalee, Ceylon, Madras, Bombay, and Cocjin, India; BushierBandar Abbas, and Kharramsha, Iran; Basra, Iraq; Ras Tanura and Jidda, Saudi Arabia; Aden; Assab and Massawa, Eritrea; Kuwait; Abu Dhabi, Sharja and Dabeil of the Trucial States of Oman; Muscat, Oman; Umm Said, Qatar; Aqaba, Jordan; and Djibouti, French Somaliland.

These were the hot lands, and in these years the Duxbury Bay was painted white, one of the few in our navy allowed that distinction to afford her some protection from the sun; and from her color she earned the nickname, the Galloping Ghost of the Persian Coast.

These were the years when her officers and men began a correspondence with first the selectmen, and later the schoolchildren of Duxbury, learning on the one hand of her proud heritage, and here at home of strange lands and exotic ports.

U.S.S. Duxbury Bay participated in several crises, especially in the Middle East in late 1956 when she extended staging support to United Nations Emergency Forces proceeding to Egypt at Suda Bay and Iraklion, Crete. In 1957 in the Indian Ocean she participated in the Ceylonese flood relief operation; but in 1962 her most dramatic role involved the evacuation of over 350 non-belligerents from Guantanamo Naval Base, Cuba. While lowering clouds of war were threatening to engulf the world, she landed all her human cargo safely in the U.S.

At last on April 29, 1966 the Duxbury Bay was decommissioned at Norfolk, Virginia after 22 years of extremely active service. She had never visited Duxbury Bay, but personal contacts between the ship's personnel and the people of Duxbury had been frequent, and on this day a special memorial ceremony was held in her honor on Powder Point Bridge. Later her ship's bell came to Duxbury, and on July 5 will be installed in the rotunda on the new Town Hall Office Building in memory of a gallant ship bearing a cherished name.

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